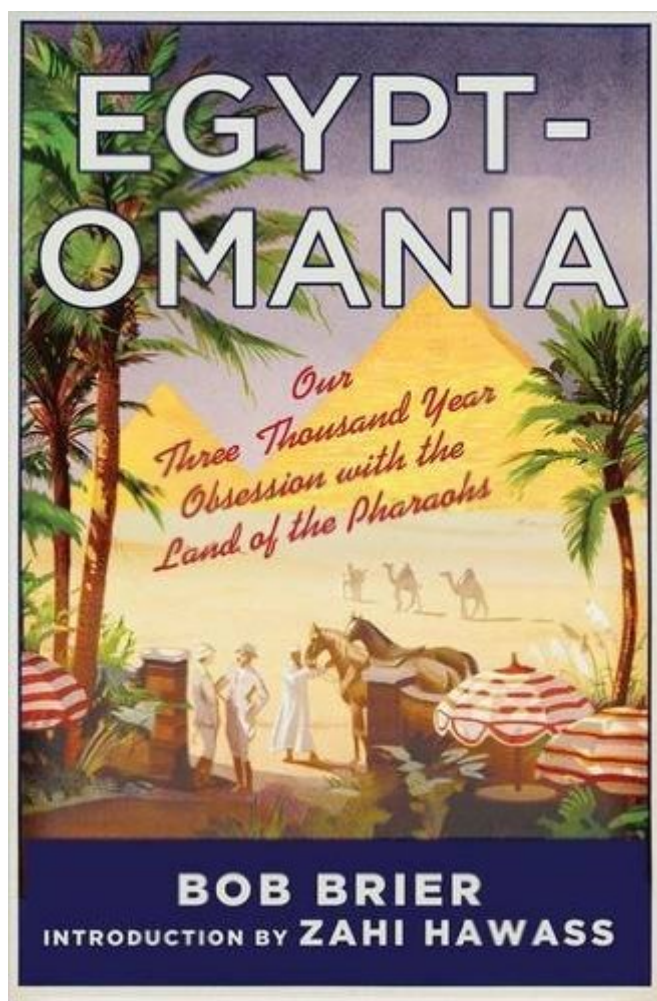


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Egyptomania: Our Three Thousand Year Obsession With The Land Of The Pharaohs



Synopsis

The world has always been fascinated with ancient Egypt. When the Romans conquered Egypt, it was really Egypt that conquered the Romans. Cleopatra captivated both Caesar and Marc Antony and soon Roman ladies were worshipping Isis and wearing vials of Nile water around their necks. What is it about ancient Egypt that breeds such obsession and imitation? Egyptomania explores the burning fascination with all things Egyptian and the events that fanned the flames--from ancient times, to Napoleon's Egyptian campaign, to the discovery of Tutankhamen's tomb by Howard Carter in the 1920s. For forty years, Bob Brier, one of the world's foremost Egyptologists, has been amassing one of the largest collections of Egyptian memorabilia and seeking to understand the pull of Ancient Egypt on our world today. In this original and groundbreaking book, with twenty-four pages of color photos from the author's collection, he explores our three-thousand-year-old fixation with recovering Egyptian culture and its meaning. He traces our enthrallment with the mummies that seem to have cheated death and the pyramids that as if they will last forever. Drawing on his personal collection--from Napoleon's twenty volume Egypt encyclopedia to Howard Carter's letters written from the Valley of the Kings as he was excavating--this is an inventive and mesmerizing tour of how an ancient civilization endures in ours today.

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Customer Reviews

I love Bob Brier. I have watched his TV broadcasts, read some of his other books, and listened to a 50-CD (I think) oral history of ancient Egypt. Heck, I even wrote him a fan letter (OK, a fan email). However, this book is little more than a trifle; a good magazine article blown up into a book. Dr. Brier

discusses the history of Egyptomania from beyond 50,000 feet - it's more like 100,000 feet - and focuses on just a few major historical events that prompted it, primarily the transportation of Egyptian obelisks to Paris, London and New York. They're interesting engineering stories, but the Egyptomania that follows the placing of the obelisks is little more than an afterthought. He also discusses a variety of Egyptomania trends in such things as jewelry, cigar and cigarette cases and popular songs, but - again - from a very broad-brush perspective. It's interesting, but only mildly so. I would have strongly preferred less engineering talk and more discussion of the phenomenon of Egyptomania - its causes and so on. Alternatively, coffee table book to go with my other dozen or so coffee table books about Egypt (yes, I am an Egyptomaniac) would have been better.

I really enjoyed this book, this was the first time I had read anything about how the fascination with Egypt has influenced and effected so many different cultures going all the way back to antiquity and is still ongoing today. The author covers the world's fascination with Egypt starting all the way back in ancient Greece to today and all the fun and serious ways people have chosen to show their love for this culture. I found the cultural aspects of Egyptomania to be the most entertaining, from the music sheets and perfume bottles to modern movies, from the exquisite and high end to the tacky, the creativity and...flexibility in reflecting ancient Egypt is incredible. However there was also a much more serious and political side to this that I had not realized, the military actions of Napoleon and Wellington, the political manoeuvrings in gaining obelisks the physical challenges in gaining and moving the obelisks were a surprise to me, I had no idea New York even had an actual Egyptian obelisk! The section on the moving of the three different obelisks got to be a bit slow and hard to get through, I understand wanting to include all the details since moving them is quite the engineering feat in and of itself, but reading about three in a row felt very repetitive in the end. This is my only quibble with the book, and even then it was a fascinating read, just slow. When visuals are so important to the point of a book I really appreciate the inclusion of color plates as well as black and white images and this book does a very good job with this. The quality of the images is high and appropriate to the text and really enhance the experience. This is a fun book and a very educational book and I am looking forward to reading more by this author on Egypt.

This could be subtitled "Much Ado about Obelisks" and for good ill. Bob Brier's discussion of the various kinds of crazes between the Napoleon to the 20th century is at a times fascinating and at times tedious. Most of the tedious bits have to do with the level of detail Brier goes into describing the various ways Obelisks were moved out of Egypt. Some of the particular interesting bits were

conflations of middle eastern culture in the early 20th century King Tut crazes as well as all the Egyptian smoking paraphernalia. I must say though that this book seems to be two different books: one about obelisks and another about various pop culture crazes around Egypt.

This is a veritable compendium of things Egyptian, which attempts to capture the American fascination with Ancient Egypt. It details how Egyptian themes pervade so much of our cultural awareness, and explains why Americans, among others, are more fascinated with Ancient Egypt than, for example, Ancient Greece or Ancient Rome. The theme of Ancient Egypt underlies our fascination with mummies, pyramids and obelisks, and this fascination manifests itself throughout American popular culture, from advertising to comics to television and the movies.

Bob Brier has an easy style of writing and he knows how to make history entertaining. You learn a lot and you laugh a lot. His extensive experience in the field earned him the title of Mr. Mummy. I love to recount his stories and that has earned me many a dinner invitation.

Although this book is written by an "insider" — Egyptologist Bob Brier has done all the requisite studying and publishing and even working with TV networks — Egyptomania is a read just about everyone will enjoy. It's strange, but nearly everyone on the planet seems to have at least a passing interest in some aspect of ancient Egypt. Brier traces this preoccupation back to Roman times, when Cleopatra was a living, breathing, and breathtakingly intelligent representative of a culture that was already thousands of years old. I really enjoyed the detail with which he reported on the Renaissance transporting of the obelisk in Rome and Napoleon's savants. The excitement of the discoveries and the melding of scholarly work with popular souvenirs is palpable. There are plenty of illustrations of engravings and later paraphernalia, like cigarette cases in the shape of temples. The author takes great care to describe the engineering marvels France, England, and New York undertook in order to obtain their obelisks, complete with severe weather and losses at sea. The exaggerated efforts required to move the obelisks in modern times only helps the reader appreciate the unknown genius of the Egyptians who constructed them in the first place. There is sure to be something new here for even the most avid Egyptomaniac, as Brier goes into the cinematic history of mummies and Cleopatra and how they were portrayed differently according to what discoveries had been made. Brier rounds up the book by gleefully reporting that he may have made the latest big discovery about the history of every's favorite boy king, Tutankamen. Egyptomania is a fast, enjoyable read that will fan the flames of any enthusiasm you already have (because you probably

have some) for ancient Egypt.

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